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SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

WITH RESPECT TO BILL 5; AN ACT TO AMEND THE EDUCATION ACT

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

JUNE 13, 1989

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Development With Respect to Bill 5 An Act to Amend the Education Act

The Ontario Public School Boards' Assocation, which represents over ninety public school boards of all sizes and from all regions of the province, is pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Social Development with respect to Bill 5, An Act to Amend the Education Act.

Heritage language programs have been the focus of much concern and debate since the December 1986 introduction of a private members' bill proposing mandated heritage language classes within the school day (Bill 80). Even though Bill 80 received second reading and consideration through public hearings by the Standing Committee on Social Development, it did not go any further. Bill 80 was followed by the June 1987 release of a Ministry of Education discussion paper entitled A Proposal for Action on Heritage Languages Programs in Ontario.

In October 1988, the Minister of Education announced that heritage language programs provided on a continuing education basis would become mandatory for Ontario school boards effective September 1989. Bill 5 proposes to give the Minister of Education the power to "require school boards to offer these programs".

OPSBA recognizes that Ontario is a province rich in cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage. This multicultural reality has been and will continue to be reflected in Ontario's public education system. We recognize that changes are required in the current program, especially in the areas of curriculum enrichment and staff development, and we agree with the need for new forms of support for school boards to assist them in further developing existing programs.

However, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association is fundamentally opposed to these programs being mandated and has a number of concerns regarding the mandatory provision of heritage language programs by school boards:

1. The mandatory establishment of heritage language programs undermines school board autonomy and ability to respond to local community concerns. There is the implicit assumption that the vast majority of school boards are in some way denying young people the opportunity to learn and appreciate their heritage language. This is not the case; school boards have been and will continue to be responsive to local community demands for education.

2. No other continuing education program is mandated by the Ministry of Education. Are mandated continuing education programs in other areas (such as adult education) to be the next step?

3. The proposal that instruction in a particular language must be provided if requested by the parents of 25 children is impractical. Included in this number would be children of all ages and abilities and possibly students from all parts of a large school district. While OPSBA does not support mandatory programs, if they are to be required they should be requested by the parents of 25 students from a given division.

4. Children with no background in the heritage language would be able to request this program. This represents an abuse of the original intention of providing heritage language programs and should not be forced on Ontario's school boards.

5. Currently, heritage language programs are optional and any transportation costs are the responsibility of the parent or guardian. If these programs are made mandatory, the onus to provide and pay for transportation must remain with the parents or guardians. If school boards are required to provide busing for students, this could prove more costly than the program itself, especially in sparsely populated areas.

6. There are funding implications. It is proposed that funding for the heritage languages program be maintained at current levels. That is, $37.50 per hour for each class of 25 pupils with a reduction of 90 cents per pupil under a class size of 25. This funding level may be inadequate and must be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that heritage language programs do not place an additional burden on the local property tax base.

7. For many heritage languages there are no available qualified teachers. Ontario's universities and colleges do not have the programs to provide qualified staff for boards to hire.

8. School boards do not have the supervisory staff with language facility to evaluate and supervise the heritage language programs.

9. Adequate approved resource materials are not available for the many heritage language programs that potentially must be offered.

OPSBA therefore recommends that heritage language programs continue to be optional programs offered on a continuing education basis, with school boards having the primary responsibility for staffing, supervision, curriculum, number and location of classes.

Bill 5

OPSBA has concerns with the brevity of Bill 5. The Bill simply states that the Minister of Education will have the power to require "boards to offer programs that deal with languages other than English or French and govern the establishment and operation of such programs".

It is only in the compendium to the Bill that the intention of the legislation is indicated. It is stated that the legislation is intended to require boards to offer these programs in elementary schools on a continuing education basis, or through the purchase from another board. No other details are provided.

Before this legislation receives Royal Assent, the intention of the legislation must be clarified and the proposed regulations concerning the establishment and maintenance of these programs must be released for consultation purposes.

The announced intent of the government to have these programs in place for September 1989 is totally unreasonable. Not only are details on the regulations governing the establishment of these programs not available, funding is not in place for in-service opportunities for heritage language instructors, and adequate resource guides and learning materials are not available.

OSPBA therefore recommends that before Bill 5 proceeds, the regulations concerning the establishment and maintenance of these programs be released for consultation purposes, and that the announced September 1989 implementation be extended.

Proposal for Action on Heritage Language Programs in Ontario

Although no details are provided on the nature of the mandated heritage language programs, OPSBA would like to make a number of comments on the Proposal for Action document in which indications are given of the possible direction the government may pursue in this area.

1) Open Access Provisions

OPSBA supports the proposed action that will enable children from public school boards to attend heritage language classes in other public school boards without the payment of fees. However, we can only support this action if the level of provincial funding is adequate to cover the full costs of these programs. Local taxpayers should not be required to subsidize programs for children from other school board jurisdictions.

2) In-Service Training Opportunities

The Ministry of Education proposed that a three-year incentive fund would be established to encourage school boards, in partnership with other agencies and groups, to sponsor in-service opportunities for heritage language instructors and their administrative, supervisory and resource personnel.

OPSBA supports the Ministry initiative in the area of in-service training but a three-year incentive fund is inadequate. Since there will exist an ongoing need for in-service training of heritage languages personnel, funding must also be provided on an on-going basis.

3) Program Resource Guide, Learning Materials and Research

OPSBA supports the proposed Ministry inititatives in these areas which include the production of a program resource guide, the establishment of an advisory committee, the development of student learning materials and, research into heritage language programs. We are pleased that it is proposed that extensive mechanisms for consultation are included in the action plan. We wish to stress however that representation on the Ministry Advisory Committee must reflect the diverse nature of the school boards throughout the province, including large and small, urban and rural, and northern and southern boards.

OPSBA recognizes the need for the development of appropriate learning materials, and supports the Ministry initative in this area. However, more information is required on the mechanism for the setting of the criteria for Ontario's Heritage Languages Program. There is no indication on who is

to set the criteria and evaluate the learning resources based on these criteria. OPSBA recommends that the mandate of the Ministry Advisory Committee be extended to fulfill this function.

OPSBA further recommends that 100% of the costs should be covered and believes that a five-year incentive fund will not be sufficient. Since there will exist an ongoing need for learning resources, funding must also be provided on an ongoing basis.

Summary

In summary, OPSBA would like to stress that:

1) The Ontario Public School Boards' Assocation does not support the mandatory establishment of heritage language programs. Ontario public school boards have demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate a commitment and responsiveness to requests for heritage languages programs in this province. This commitment and responsiveness makes it unnecessary for these programs to be mandated.

2) The Ministry proposals for action in the areas of in-service training, curriculum development and research into heritage language programs, for the most part, are positive steps in assisting school boards in developing existing programs. However, funding for these initiatives must be provided on an ongoing basis.

If these programs are to be mandated:

3) Bill 5 must not receive Royal Assent before the regulations governing the establishment and maintenance of these programs are made available for consultation purposes.

4) The proposed unreasonable implementation date of September 1989 must be revised.

5) Open access provisions for heritage language programs should be applied only if funding for these programs cover the full cost of these programs.